

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER
GENERAL STEPHEN GLEDHILL, DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL,
MULTINATIONAL TRANSITION COMMAND IRAQ, VIA TELECONFERENCE
FROM IRAQ

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GEN. GLEDHILL: Good afternoon, or is it just -- I mean, it's probably good
morning for you, isn't it?

My name is Brigadier Stephen Gledhill. As you can probably already tell, I'm a
Brit, British officer, and I'm the deputy commanding general of the Multinational
Security Transition Command Iraq. And I'm --

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Thank
you very much for joining us, sir.

GEN. GLEDHILL: Yeah. Great. I'm deputy to Lieutenant General Jim Dubik, a
great leader, who runs MNSTC-I, as it's affectionately known over here. And I'm very
happy to answer really any questions relating to the mission of MNSTC-I, which -- it's

probably worth just reminding people that we have two very closely linked tasks here. The first is to assist the Iraqis in organizing, manning, training, equipping and basing their security forces. That is both the armed forces -- army, navy and air force -- and importantly, the police as well.

And we also have a second, as I say, closely related task, which is to assist both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior in their institutional development, so that they are able to field and support the security forces.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Well, thank you very much.

And DJ, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Good afternoon, Brigadier. I was -- this is DJ Elliott from The Long War Journal. I was wondering about the development of the Iraqi army's engineering forces. That's one of those things they're going to need to be independent. I was wondering if you could fill in any details on that.

GEN. GLEDHILL: Yes, certainly I could. The -- what we've done is, we have -- every Iraqi army division -- and we currently have 11 divisions which are fielded and in the fight, and two more which are in force generation. Each army division has an engineer -- sorry -- each army brigade inside the divisions has an engineer company as part of its establishment. So every -- I'd say every brigade has an engineer company. And that is also joined by an EOD company, which works closely alongside it, engineering and EOD being very closely related. And that's part of every brigade in the army.

In addition, there are further plans to generate next year two other important engineer capabilities. The first is to generate an infrastructure support capability, which will be capable of repairing oil pipelines and repairing electricity cabling in areas which are under heavy threat, and that's an important initiative that's in place. And secondly, we're looking towards producing a fourth-level engineer regiment, which would include important supporting functions such as bridging, et cetera.

And the last part, I would say, is that already established in the Iraqi structure is their engineer school, which is in a place called Taji, which is just north of Baghdad. And in fact, I have to say -- I've been there several times -- it's one of their best. It's extremely well organized, very capable instructors, and fields capable units and soldiers.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jared?

Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time. Perhaps you could talk a little bit more generally about the progress you've seen in the last few months. Obviously, we're seeing now hundreds of articles coming out about the progress of the Iraqi security forces, but perhaps you could link that to the training and to the tactics and to the general skill level of the Iraqis that you work with.

GEN. GLEDHILL: Yeah. Thanks very much for asking that.

There is absolutely no doubt -- I've now been here for eight months. And whilst, of course, the focus of much of the -- I suppose the media here is upon the success of the operations mounted by the coalition forces, led by the Americans, that shouldn't take away from the enormous -- the enormous steps forward which the Iraqi security forces have also taken.

And they've taken -- they've moved forward in a number of areas, first of all in the scale of them, the size of them. And just to give you some idea, it's often said that they have grown over this year to a size now of some 465,000, if we include that's both the police and the army. The armed forces are 158,000, growing as we speak towards 190,000, and the police are well in excess of 300,000. So there's undoubtedly been a very considerable growth in the number of and the size of the armed forces.

Let me give you -- go a little further than that. The army and the national police, who are their paramilitary police force, have got some 191 battalions who are now in the fight, and of the 191 -- and this is a key statistic, I think -- 97 of them, so more than half, are capable of taking the lead on operations.

You know, they are essentially able to operate without coalition support or with very little coalition support. And the other 90 are, you know, close behind. We're partnering with them to try and bring them on. So that's on a sort of just looking at it in terms of scale.

What we MNSTC-I have been doing, in order to enable that to happen, is we've been making considerable investments in the training infrastructure which supports the Iraqi armed forces. For instance, we now have -- we have established are now expanding a combat training center at the Iraqi base at a place called Besmaya, some 50 miles east of Baghdad, which will be able to take a brigade at a time through training. It's a really excellent facility. Fantastic rangers, I have to say, just -- quite as good as any I've seen in the United Kingdom. They're very impressive.

And in addition, we have already built a number of training bases throughout the country, and we have a joint plan with the Iraqis so that next year, building on the success we've already had, we will provide each of the Iraqi army divisions with their own divisional training center, where they will be able to rotate in turn a battalion into it and go through all the sort of training sequences that you'd expect a battalion to undertake.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And Bruce?

Q Yes, sir. Bruce McQuain with QandO.net. One of the things we've been told -- well, for quite some time -- is holding up the full deployment of the Iraqi security forces is the sustainment piece, the logistics package, the ability to support themselves in

the field. I'm wondering if you could give us an update on the status of that particular piece?

GEN. GLEDHILL: Yeah. I mean, you are right. And it is true to say that logistic support has been problematic, or fragile. But that was not a surprise, because we have been jointly -- i.e., the coalition and the Iraqis have, I think rightly, focused upon producing combat units to get them into the fight as a first priority.

And I, you know, said earlier how many battalions there are now -- there are now there. So I'm sure that was the right decisions which were taken over the last couple of years. That we move -- as the size of the force and the nature of it matures, we need to put in a proper functioning logistic system, which -- you know, there's no hiding the fact that it's not in place now. It's partly in place, but not entirely.

I mean, for instance, third line maintenance is currently provided by contractors paid for essentially by U.S. taxpayers, and clearly that is not something that can carry on for much longer. So we have developed with our Iraqi partners a plan which will deliver considerable enhancements to their logistic capability. Again, we're looking out over a time frame of about a year. Let me just tell you some of the things that we are going to achieve in that time.

Each Iraqi army division is going to be provided with its own logistic support base. This is a static third line base, which will provide to cover the area in which the division is operating, and that will provide both supply and maintenance of equipment from there. We -- currently, we have a smaller number of what are called regional support units, and they're clearly not sufficient to cover now the much expanded force structure. So we'll put in place divisional support units. In addition, we are establishing third line support based around Taji. This is a place I just mentioned earlier, north of Baghdad, where there will be the third line support units will be put in place, including all the depots, all the trained manpower, and also a fourth line, base repair facilities for Iraqi wheeled and tracked vehicles.

So in summary, yes, logistics is behind the rest of the growth in the Iraqi security forces, but we now have -- well, we've known about it all along, but we now recognize that now is the time to address this and put in place logistics which will essentially -- we intend within a year or 18 months make the Iraqis self-sufficient in terms of logistics.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: John.

Q Yes, sir. I was interested based on some of the previous roundtables we've had with other senior leaders in your neck of the woods, how are we doing at building a more efficient and perhaps at least late 20th century bureaucratic structure for the Iraqi armed forces and security forces?

GEN. GLEDHILL: There is no doubt that the bureaucratic processes inside both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior are immature, and there's no getting away from that.

What I reflect, though, when we look at that, is that I say to myself: They are undertaking unprecedented -- an unprecedented rate of growth in the size of the force that they are having to support. And my American colleagues here tell me that the last time that the American Army was involved in growth of its -- you know, growth of its armed forces at that rate was the Second World War. I mean, that -- we need to understand that's the type of challenge that this bureaucracy is facing. And it's doing it at the same time as it's fighting a war, on its own turf. So we need to understand the background, the context, in which this is taking place, and it is extremely challenging.

Now, are we making progress? Yes, we are. And we measure that by an objective process, which we conduct jointly with the Iraqis, in both ministries, which we call the Transition Readiness Assessment, which each month looks through the key functions that any ministry would have to undertake: you know, the ability to acquire materiel and to field it; the ability to acquire people and train them and equip them; the ability to pay people and so on, all the key functions that are actually common to any security ministry in any country in the world.

And this assessment process that we go through, I say, each month, which we do jointly with the Iraqis, allows us to both assess where they are, but of course, more importantly, deciding which areas we need to focus to try and improve them.

As I look back over my -- I say, my eight months here, it's quite clear that there has been steady -- I won't say any faster than that, but there has been steady improvement right across the piece, in both ministries, so that when I arrived -- we do a sort of headline here of -- when we look at each category, we do a headline in the sense that we grade it as red, orange, yellow or green, depending on how capable it is.

When I arrived, most categories were in the orange, the amber area. In eight months, I think I can safely say that we have moved them from where the balance of the sort of the colors, if you like, is in yellow. And yellow we define as being capable, with some limitations requiring coalition force support.

So it's definitely moving in the right direction.

There's still a lot of work to do, but it's a lot of work to do in the context of the challenge which is being faced here fighting a war and growing at an unprecedented rate.

Q Well, thank you, sir. And I'll just say that the strategic communication plan's working, because you're all saying mostly the same thing, just different ways from your perspectives.

GEN. GLEDHILL: (Laughs.) Well, I don't know whether it's a plan, but I can certainly -- (laughs) -- I've been here -- (inaudible word) -- thought about what you've just said, but I've been here now for, you know, I think just about a sufficient length of time to, if you like, see these changes, gradual, but I'm -- well, I'm pretty positive about the direction things are going in.

MR HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Any follow-up questions?

Q I've got one. It's DJ Elliott again. I notice the 7th Division sent a battalion all the way down to Diwaniyah. That sounds a bit like they're starting to stand up some quick-reaction force battalions in the divisions. Are they? Or what are they doing in terms of that structure?

GEN. GLEDHILL: No, they're not. They haven't -- there is no intent of establishing specific specialist quick-reaction battalions or something in every battalion -- in every division. That's not the case. I mean, we are working towards ensuring that each of the nine or 12 battalions in each division are equally capable of deploying and conducting operations, I mean, anywhere in Iraq. We're not there yet because -- for one reason, because of the logistics limitations that we spoke about earlier.

But that deployment that you just described in itself, I think, was a good-news story because that showed -- that was an operation which was planned by the Iraqis, that was -- you know, the coalition wasn't part of the planning. They planned it. They organized the movement of that battalion, which in terms of distance -- I'm looking -- (inaudible) -- it's probably the best part of a couple of hundred kilometers, over a hundred miles is that, and they plugged it into a different division and so on, exactly the same as I would think of doing things in the U.K. army or you do every day in the American Army, essentially. So that shows an increase in their capability to move and to operate.

Q And I have a follow-up, sir. Based on what you know in the future plans for the training of the army and the plans for the army, what are you most excited about seeing? And perhaps you won't be able to see it in your tour, but in the future what things do you think are coming up which give more hope and are more good-news stories?

GEN. GLEDHILL: That's a very good question. I think it's because we increasingly see the Iraqis taking the lead. We have a very good plan here, which essentially sees the coalition force in the lead, then moving to partnering and then to Iraqi leading. Where we are now is that most of the Iraqi units are partnered with the coalition, but an increasing number are moving into the leading role.

And I have every confidence that over the next 12 months, Iraqi battalions and brigades will increasingly take the lead in the battlespace.

Of course, I'm sure that the coalition will be there, you know, able to give them support if they require it in terms of ISR or fires or even reinforcement if it's needed, but fundamentally the Iraqis are now taking ownership of the battlespace themselves, and I think this is an extremely positive move and it really demonstrates the growth in their capability.

MR. HOLT: Anyone else? (No response.)

All right. Brigadier Stephen Gledhill, thank you very much for joining us here, sir. Do you have any closing statements or closing thoughts for us?

GEN. GLEDHILL: Well, yes, I have. I mean, inevitably I find when I do these sort of things that I find most of the questions refer to the army, and of course we all understand why. But we do have this equally important mission out here, which is supporting the Ministry of the Interior and the police. And there have been some really very significant improvements in the area of police responsibility over the -- well, over the last month, really. I'll just pick up two of them which I think are worth my while mentioning.

The first one is that we opened, just 10 days ago, a new what the Iraqis call a 130 tips hotline. In effect, it's a national 911 center, with all using the most modern communications computer systems there to assist them, whereby anybody in the country can ring -- you know, can phone in with either -- actually with what I would call a normal police problem, or just importantly in this country, a tip as regards, you know, terrorist or insurgent action. And it's a quite outstanding facility that has been opened next to the Ministry of the Interior and I'm convinced will play a vital role in the fight against terrorism in this country and will, I'm absolutely certain, save lives.

The second area -- and again Ministry of the Interior -- is that the Ministry of the Interior, one of its responsibilities is to secure the borders of this country and to police the entry ports. That's both the land, sea and air ports. And two years ago, to be honest, they were at a pretty low standard, but only, again, within the last two weeks they have opened a particularly important entry port called al Qaim on the Syrian-Iraqi border, which is in the main road that essentially runs from Damascus down to Baghdad.

And this has been -- again, it's state of the art, with all the appropriate security and technology-checking devices that you can imagine.

We've been heavily involved in providing them advice and paying for much of the equipment.

We have -- people from your Department of Homeland Security have been over here assisting us in training the Iraqis up there to ensure that they're at the required standard of performance. And this will not only ensure the security of the borders, which is -- for that entry point -- which is very important, but perhaps more important or at least

just as important is that it will do a great deal for the -- to build up commerce and help develop the economy in this country. And I -- when this border opened, which had been closed for a year, there were lines and lines of trucks just waiting to come from Syria into Iraq, going through all the appropriate security checks, and of course there were lines of trucks from Iraq waiting to go into Syria. This is -- you know, this is commerce. This is capitalism at work, if you like, whereby the economy of this country will grow.

But I think -- oh, it's just one other thing, if I may, on that -- you may have seen reports in the press in the last 24 hours about Iraqis returning home from Syria. And indeed they have. And just over the last 24 hours, the Iraqi government has organized a convoy of coaches to bring back several hundred people from -- Iraqis from Syria. It was all arranged and organized by the Iraqi army. Security was provided, and of course they used this newly opened border crossing at al Qaim to get from Damascus down here into Baghdad.

So it's all part of this wider requirement that you have in fighting and winning a counterinsurgency campaign, whereby you need to draw together the security aspects, the political aspects, the diplomatic aspects and, of course, the economy as well. I think progress has been --

MR. HOLT: That is impressive. Thank you very much, sir.

And we appreciate you joining us here today for the Bloggers Roundtable. And I know we're out of time here, but we do appreciate it, and we look forward to being able to speak with you again, sir.

GEN. GLEDHILL: Great pleasure. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

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